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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HOSTS HUMAN RIGHTS DAY EVENT IN GHANA

REF: A. STATE 202764

[1](#)B. ACCRA 01450

[1](#)C. ACCRA 02458

[1](#)1. Summary: On December 9 the Ambassador hosted a Human Rights Day celebration at her residence for 80 human rights activists, journalists and Government of Ghana officials. As part of the ceremony, the Ambassador awarded six Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) grants totaling \$55,000 to locally-based non-governmental organizations. Invited speakers from the Government of Ghana (GOG)'s leading human rights body as well as the Ghana Journalists' Association, and civil society cited corruption, prisoners on remand, treatment of refugees, domestic violence and the lack of surveillance regulations as top human rights concerns. End summary.

AMBASSADOR'S REMARKS

[1](#)2. The Ambassador commended the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) for sponsoring a week-long Human Rights Day program to raise awareness of the problem of corruption. She praised the progress of Ghana and its neighbors toward stronger democracies and respect for human rights. The Ambassador highlighted the election of Africa's first woman president, Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson, as an example of democracy taking root in Liberia.

[1](#)3. The Ambassador, however, pointed out that pervasive corruption, life-threatening prison conditions, police abuses, child labor and traditional practices that discriminate against women and children persist in Ghana. (Note: These are all documented in our annual Human Rights Report. End note.) She said concern is mounting about mob attacks on police stations, vigilante justice, violence between police and protestors, and intimidation of the press. She urged the Government of Ghana to pass legislation to outlaw domestic violence and discrimination against the disabled and to protect those who expose corruption.

GOG CITES REFUGEE FATIGUE, PRISON ABUSES

[1](#)4. Anna Bossman, Acting Commissioner of CHRAJ, described Ghana's refugee situation as "alarming, in view of the numbers... as opposed to our resource constraints." Bossman also deplored "degrading and often inhuman treatment meted out to our prisoners." She echoed the Ambassador's call to pass the Domestic Violence, Disability and Whistle Blower bills. Additionally, she called on Parliament to pass the Freedom of Information Bill as well as the entire draft legislation on domestic violence, including a controversial clause repealing spousal immunity from assault and other charges under the Criminal Code.

CIVIL SOCIETY SUBJECT TO SURVEILLANCE

[1](#)8. Dr. Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, Director of the Center for Democratic Development, expressed concern about inadequate regulations and controls on Ghana's security agencies who wire tap and bug citizens and organizations. He also highlighted the lack of progress on the rights of the child and remand prisoners, and pointed to the need for more police officers and for stronger human rights institutions.

Comment

[1](#)9. This event received extensive media coverage and reinforced the Mission's commitment to human rights. Key police officials and other GOG officials attended, even though their agencies are often criticized for human rights abuses. Bossman is more forward-leaning on prison conditions and domestic violence than other GOG officials. Her remarks about refugees reflects some growing frustration with refugees within the GOG and among Ghanaians generally. The fact that she and the other speakers felt comfortable to talk so freely about sensitive human rights issues in a high profile event like this environment underscores Ghana's generally positive record on human rights and free speech.